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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENTS OF HEALTH AND GAME AND INLAND
FISHERIES REMIND RESIDENTS TO AVOID CONTACT WITH BATS**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) are reminding residents that bats become more active and visible in our communities this time of year. Bats play important roles in our environment, but like other wild animals, they can carry potentially fatal diseases such as rabies.

Rabies is caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system, and is almost always fatal once symptoms develop. The rabies virus is found primarily in the saliva and brain tissue of rabid animals. The virus is usually transmitted through a bite, but could be transmitted when a rabid animal's saliva or brain tissue contacts a person's eye or mouth. Rabies vaccinations can prevent rabies in dogs, cats, ferrets and some livestock. However, there are no licensed rabies vaccines available for wild and exotic animals.

"It is very important for people to avoid contact with wild animals, and domestic animals that they do not know. Bats present a special concern because their tiny bites may not be recognized," said Julia Murphy, D.V.M., state public health veterinarian. "Fewer than one percent of bats are infected with rabies. However, bats that are behaving abnormally, such as those being active during the day or found in a room of your home or unable to fly, have a higher probability of being positive for rabies."

According to the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, rabies in bats accounted for almost 20 percent of all rabies in animals reported in 2004 in the United States. The 1,361 cases in 2004 represented an increase of more than 12 percent compared to 2003.

"Bats are an important natural resource and valuable assets to our lives," said Rick Reynolds, VDGIF wildlife diversity biologist. "Several species of bats are now endangered, so we must be mindful of the environmental importance of bats, recognize the value of living safely with them, and seek ways to protect their habitats."

Through the study of bats, scientists have gained valuable knowledge about sonar, navigational aids for the blind, treatment of strokes, vaccine development and artificial insemination. Several bats in Virginia are listed on the state and federal endangered lists. The Rafinesque's big-eared, Virginia big-eared, Indiana and gray bats are all endangered.

Bats normally fly at night, eating various insects including mosquitoes and agricultural pests such as corn borer moths. During the day, they roost quietly by hanging upside down. Bats can enter homes through small openings and may end up roosting in attics. In hot months, they may seek cooler temperatures and be found in living spaces. If you see a bat in your home and are sure there has been no human or pet contact, allow the bat to find its way back outdoors by closing off the room, turning on the lights and opening all windows and doors that open to the outside.

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If bats are roosting in the house, try to find out how they entered by observing their exit holes at dusk. Once you have found the holes where the bats enter into your house, cover the area loosely with plastic sheeting, wire mesh or bird netting which will allow them to leave by crawling out but not re-enter. The best time to do this is either between April and May or August and September, as young bats are typically born in late May or in June.

Avoid trapping young bats in the house during the summer months. During the summer, many of these young bats are unable to fly. They may become trapped inside and die or may make their way into living quarters. Hire a company that has experience with removing bats from buildings so that you and the bats are kept safe.

Once you are sure that all bats have left your house, bat-proof your property. Carefully examine your home for holes that might allow bats to enter. Any openings larger than a quarter-inch by half-inch should be sealed with caulking or other suitable material. Install window screens and chimney caps, use draft guards beneath attic doors, fill electrical and plumbing holes with steel wool or caulking and ensure that all doors to the outside close tightly.

If you are bitten by a bat or awaken to find a bat in your room, try to capture the bat so it can be tested for rabies. This approach is also recommended if you find a bat in the room of an unattended child or someone else who is unable to report whether the bat had contact with them. Call your local health department or an animal control agency for advice.

To find out more about the benefits of bats and safe coexistence with bats, visit [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/bats_ & rabies/bats&.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/bats_&_rabies/bats&.htm). For more information about rabies, visit the VDH Web site, www.vdh.virginia.gov and click on Rabies Awareness.

Instructions for capturing a bat

Carefully avoid direct contact with the bat and avoid damaging its head.

- Close the windows, room doors and closet doors; turn on the lights if the room is dark
- Wait for the bat to land
- Wearing gloves (heavy, preferably thick leather), cover the bat with a coffee can or similar container with a lid
- Slide a piece of cardboard under the can, trapping the bat
- With one hand firmly holding the cardboard in place against the top of the can, turn the can right side up
- Replace the cardboard with the lid (if there is no lid, tape the cardboard tightly to the can)
- Call your local health department to arrange for rabies examination of the bat.

If you find a dead bat, double-bag it in plastic and place it in a cooler or refrigerated area. *Do* not store the bat in the same cooler or refrigerator as food or pharmaceuticals. Keep it away from potential contact with people or other animals. Do not handle bats, either alive or dead, with bare hands.

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